

Top Ten Elements of a Good Story from UPIU.com

Adapted from list by UPIU mentor Beth Potter

1. Your lead must be catchy.

If your friend's eyes glaze over when she hears it, it's not catchy enough. (TIP: Say the lead out loud to yourself. If it's hard to say in one breath, it's probably too long. In general, leads can be up to 35 words but remember, "Brevity is the source of wit.")

2. Your story must be unique.

New studies, new decisions, new trends, are just a few of the things that can make for good hard news stories. Features and profiles should be about unusual and/or new information or people. Readers will not be interested if you write about things they know already.

3. All stories must have at least two sources.

A good story should have three or more sources. Quotes from your sources should say something more interesting than just factual information. (For example: "Michigan has cold winters," is not a good quote because the information is something everyone already knows.)

4. "Write tight, write bright."

Brief stories are almost always more engaging than long stories. Many hard news stories are 350 words or less. Features and profiles can be 400-800 words. On the Internet, especially, shorter is better.

5. Attribute as much information as you can.

This makes your story more credible to readers and keeps their attention.

6. All sources must include both first and last names.

Ask your source to spell his or her name and title when you do the interview. If you do not include a source's name in your story, you MUST explain why. Some examples could be: an underage child, a rape victim, etc. Your story is not credible and cannot be published if this basic rule is not followed.

7. Answer all questions!

If a quote might raise a question in a reader's mind, you can either a.) not use it, or b.) explain it. Cut anything that seems ambiguous.

8. DO NOT, under any circumstance, give your own opinion in a story.

Factual background information is OK. Opinion words are not.

9. Use American spellings, including organized instead of organized, honor instead of honour, etc.

10. Always consult your stylebook, have a dictionary handy, and give your story one final read before filing it.

This lets your editor know that you care about the quality of your work.